



# **What's the 'V' Stand for**

**InsominiacArrest**

## What's the 'V' Stand for by InsomniacArrest

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**Summary:**

"What's the 'V' stand for?" Richie asks absently.

"What do you think it stands for?" He snaps back, "I know you've been called this enough to addle your brain, but loser isn't actually a compliment."

"Aw, I see," he traces the red v with his finger, "Loser. Red V. I see what you were getting at."

"No you don't."

"Too bad I've been getting your mom's red V-" Richie yelps as Eddie steps on his toe.

---Richie asks about Eddie's cast and the Loser's Club has a movie night--- [tumblr](#)

## 1. Stands for Very Much

“What’d you add the ‘v’ for?” It was a cool summer day, on the cusp of settling into a crisp chill, Eddie was thinking about mold and the peeling paint on the outside of Richie Tozier’s house.

Richie was tapping on the words on Eddie’s cast and examining his fix-it marker handiwork.

Eddie was already on the edge of rolling his eyes and it wasn’t 5pm yet, “I know you’ve been called this enough to addle your small brain, but loser isn’t actually a compliment.”

Richie sniffs and Eddie hopes he doesn’t have a cold, “Loser though? With a red V.” Richie bounced his eyebrows up and down, “I see what you did there-”

“No you don’t.”

“Eyes on the prize, I get it. Too bad I’ve been getting your mom’s red V all al-” Eddie ran him casually into the wall.

“Wow,” He says blandly, “I can’t believe that evil fucking clown came back and no one ever heard from Trashmouth Tozier again.”

Richie shook his head with a tongue click, “Eddie, Eddie, Eddie,” he put an arm around his shoulder, “that’s the v talking.”

Eddie stepped on his foot.

There was one last hurrah for the Loser’s Club, it turned out Bev was leaving in the morning and they settled on doing *something*. Besides, after all they had been through there wasn’t much else to do but stare at each other dead in the face and forget you were almost eaten a couple days ago like kid patte.

They decided on a movie night.

It felt like a summer thing, a summer thing they should have been doing all along and now it didn’t feel exactly like they should be

doing in the least bit.

Eddie arrived at Richie's house first because that's who he was and Richie held the movie night since his parents deeply didn't care to the point of religion about seven strange kids in their house apparently.

Eddie makes his way into the next room and forces himself not to check the dark corners or over his shoulder for any hands hovering there. He distracts himself by itching the skin under his sweaty cast and stiffly walking the rest of the way into Richie's house, it was cluttered, cluttered and messy and neglected like a sad dog you never pet. But lived in, that felt good for once.

"Do you need help preparing snacks?" Eddie asks politely because he wasn't an animal just yet.

Richie looked over his shoulder at him, still nursing a bruised toe, "I don't know, lover boy," he articulates the nickname slowly, "ya bring any?"

He nods slowly. Of course he did, he always brought the snacks. "Just checking," he says with lackluster, "Also, I don't see the issue. Lover is still better then loser."

"Look boy-o," Richie slung his arm around Eddie's shoulder again, he kept doing that. "The Lover's Club is an entirely different ball park, capiche? I'll tell you about when your pubes grow in."

He rubs his temple, "shut the fuck up Rich." He elbows him gently, "I know you have a keen interest in my pubes, but your sister asked first." He says sharply and Richie covers his mouth.

"I'll warn my sister about the crabs you're giving her then," he rolls his eyes, "but as your father-in-law I bet you brought milk chocolate nut clusters too, so I forgive you."

Eddie shrugged, "I mean, yeah."

Richie ruffled his hair, "this is why you're my favorite." Eddie has to stand there for another couple seconds before he reaches back to get his backpack and takes out the chocolate clusters. Eddie pauses, *his*

*favorite.*

It took another ten minutes before anyone else started to show up, figures. First it was Mike with a couple extra blankets, then Stanley with a soda jug, Bev and Bill came together before Ben made it over with a handful of movies he dug up.

The films were mostly fun sparkly flicks that Eddie figured he might spend half the time zoning out on, which sounded ideal. He also brought a couple bright shiny new films Eddie hadn't even been allowed to glance at with his mother around.

He blinks, "I'm for Back to the Future." Several movies sat in pretty piles of 'considering', 'no's' and 'Richie stop bringing down weird films with suggestive foreign titles.'

The voting commenced awhile ago and then dragged on with all seven of them huddled around the table and staring each other down.

"Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure," Mike offered, "could be...fun?" They almost all shrug in unison.

"What about Indiana Jones?" Bev offers offhandedly, both Ben and Bill sat up straight.

"I'm for Indiana Jones!" Bill's voice cracks and Eddie snorts at his earnest expression.

"Now now boys and Bev," Eddie jumps briefly as the lights flicker on and off, "I have the perfect solution to our problems." His stomach drops, a small groan formed in the back of his throat.

Richie walks out on his tiptoes, wearing a cape and hiding what he could only assume is a VHS, "just the thing for it... ta-dah!" He swings off the long swath of cloth and shoves a bloody red cover at them.

"Ah!" Someone covers their mouth as they gasp, he could feel the group forming a collective scowl.

"Nothing like that..." Bill mutters, quietly but firmly.

“Come on,” Richie held up Pet Sematary, “it’ll be canceling out our other fear...with different fear. The alpha fear, like a forest fire. And I’m smokey the bear, offering you some fucking cat zombies.”

Eddie was the first one to heave a giant sigh, “if you watch it alone by yourself first, sure.”

Richie shoots him a betrayed look, “et tu, lover?” He shakes the film, “not even my fear theory is going over tonight, tough crowd.”

“When Harry Met Sally it is.” Ben makes an executive decision for them and slips in the first romantic comedy of the night.

Eddie relaxes back into the cushions, ready to zone out and stop checking behind his back for teeth or the ceiling for blood spots. He had already thrown his watch away along with a lot of clothes he wore even remotely near those days.

He’s not sure it’s helped.

Mike settled in next to him with Ben at the other end and Bev perched on the arm of the couch. Stanley secured himself in the only recliner chair and that left Bill with the floor next to Bev’s feet and probably Richie next to him, that’s just the accepted configuration of the world he guessed.

Harry started to say something on screen and the camera panned over an apartment, Richie walked back into the room, having gone to stash away the horror movie he found. His eyes focus on Eddie with stern apprehension.

He frowns and crosses his arms, “Seat jacked.” He points at the couch, “*In my own house.* ”

The other two on the couch just shrug and Eddie smirks at him, he knew perfectly well this was *his* seat. Richie picks his away across the room and shoves a chocolate cluster in his mouth on the way over, Eddie wrinkles his nose and thinks about cavities.

Richie pauses before him, Eddie raises an eyebrow, he looks him up and down, “you’re blocking the screen.”

“Alright...but you’re blocking up my couch.”

Eddy gives him a wry look, “maybe if you were faster motor-”

Richie raises an eyebrow, “oh?”

He nods and makes a show of settling back in Richie’s spot, widening his stance and sticking his chest out. “Trash sits outside.”

“Well then!” Richie turns around and puts his arms in the air, he flops down backward onto him,

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!” Eddie squirms deeper into the cushions as Richie fell onto his lap.

“You know what you walked into.” He said with his hand on his forehead, Eddie huffs and tries to push him off.

“A walking coronary disease.”

“C-come on Richie,” Bill tugged on Richie’s pant leg, probably trying to keep everyone in line. “S-steady as it goes.”

“Aw, Bill, see? I’m following orders, lover,” he points at the words on the cast, “I am being the love. Forgiving sitting in my seat. Not talking about the elephant in the room. Courteously not bringing my legions of sweet tang to come over to our movie night.”

Eddie blew hair out of his face, “You’re going to die alone Richie Tozier.”

He turns back to him and puts an arm around his neck, “Not without you hun.”

That’s how Eddie Kaspbrak ended up with one Richie Tozier in his lap for the night, a worse predicament than he would have presumed, Richie was not still, and he was not quiet.

“I know he’s going to kiss her,” he shoves popcorn in his mouth, “now.” The couple keeps staring into each other's eyes, “nnnnnow.” They keep talking, Richie shifts on his lap, “and *now*. ”

"I don't think you understand the position you're in," Eddie grumbles at him and shifts Richie to the side, "I could end you." Richie just throws him a thumbs up.

"Control your 'love' Ed," Bev throws popcorn at them.

"I can't," Eddie says bitterly, "we're not, and his mouth belongs to the garbage devil already. I don't control anything."

"*Yeah*, Eddie's mom controls this mouth."

He groans and puts his forehead on Richie's back, "I think I must have done something pretty terrible in a past life."

Richie chuckles against him and Eddie notices Bill looking up at the ceiling, "didn't we all."

They all go a little quiet and watch the end of the movie, Richie ends up guessing when Harry kissed Sally kiss on the 27th go. Eddie blows air out his nose and feels his bony ass dig into his thighs, he doesn't kick him off.

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They all drop off to sleep one by one, Stanley during Dead Poets Society, Mike during the guitar scene in Back to the Future and Richie during the credits. Ben fell asleep at the beginning of Ghostbusters II. Bev and Bill snuck off to talk in the other room, he knew it was talking because he kept hearing whispering about the US postal system and how much stamps cost.

Eddie really wanted to nod off too, he didn't want to listen to Bev try to remember her new address or Ben mumble anxiously in his sleep. And the main concern. The very concerning concern.

Richie was still on his lap, propped up against his chest and dozing softly with his mouth open; Eddie was watching, he wish he wanted to do something else, anything at all but watch. Richie's glasses were askew and his long eyelashes caught the light.

He almost wanted to take the hulky bottle cap glasses off and put



them safely to the side, instead he just watches them tilt dangerously close to the tip of his nose. He watches his chest gently rise and fall and his glasses teeter on the edge of the abyss. Eddie stares off into nothing.

The jolt comes around 2am, right when he was imagining his mom's expression when he left that night and almost drifting off, Eddie felt a violent twist on his lap.

"Ri-"

Richie jerked in place and his face screwed up into contorted panic, his legs kicked out. He was breathing heavily and pawing the air frantically, Eddie grabs his shoulder roughly.

"Richie..." He shakes him, "Richie!"

Richie starts awake, eyes wild and sweat forming on his brow, he was still panting, he swings around messily for a moment before his eyes lands on Eddie and his shoulders un-tense.

"Oh," he settles back down, "man," he rubs the back of the head and looks all around the room before settling back on Eddie. Richie coughs, "Too much fight training. I was about to sock you."

Eddie could feel Richie's heartbeat pulsing through his whole body and he meets his eye, "The arcade doesn't count." He says wearily, "And you don't have to... I have them too."

Richie contemplates him for a moment, thinking, looking Eddie over. He nods and relaxes against him.

"This sucks." He finally says.

"I know."

"I mean this really fucking sucks," he tilts their heads together, inches apart, "I'm gonna be on some loony TV show soon. Young boy is a scientifically proven beaver magnet, also had some evil clown shit ruin his brain."

"We're young," Eddie says and rubs his weary eyes, "I was reading about PTSD in my book. It goes...away. At some point. Maybe with some high end therapy and a lot of dream journaling."

"Goes away sometime soon though?" Richie raised an eyebrow, "'cause I could use my dreams about hot pockets again- or really anything else at this point." Eddie watched Richie's movement's, bobbing up and down and swaying.

"Maybe," He reaches over takes Richie's glasses off of his nose.

"Hey!"

"They were falling off," he tucks them over on the table next to them. "And we just have to remember it's gone," he furrows his brow, "and if not we'll just fucking kill it again."

Richie gives a faint smile, "that's what I like to hear Eds." Eddie makes a face at him and Richie turns in place, "that's what I like to hear lover boy?"

Eddie groans, "For one, no Eds. For two, honestly, what would you have me change it to? It's a pretty obvious one assmouth."

Richie taps his chin, "Lomer."

"Lomer is *not* a word."

"Sure it is, I lome here, I lome there. Eddie is a huuuge lomer."

He sighs, "and so is Richie."

He shrugs and then tilts his head, "Sure." They spend another long moment looking at each other, the movie *Ghostbusters II* flashes in the background as the soft credits roll. Richie examines him, "How about liver?"

"Right," he pokes Richie's side, "Liver. Shortened to 'live' maybe and I could have been some dumbass walking irony when I walked into the clown's cave."

“Hey, but we did live Eds,” Richie cheers and Eddie gives a small smile and ignores the nickname for a moment.

“Who’d a thought.”

“I smacked that honking chucklefuck with my metal bat, remember? Pretty sick,” he bounced his eyebrows up and down.

Eddie tilted his chin up, “Yeah, I don’t think you’ll let us forget.”

“Hey, getting covered in clown jizz-vomit and yelling ‘I’m going to fucking kill you’ is a close second.” He settled down deeper into Eddie’s lap, “good stuff.”

“I’m still washing my hair,” he mutters.

“Is that what you’re nightmares are about?” Richie asks, softly, loosely as he looked at the ceiling with the flashing lights of the screen. “Hot showers where your hair is still a mess?”

He cringes, “sure Richie, hot shower nightmares.”

He chuckles, “am I there?”

“Definitely a nightmare.”

Richie laughs a little more and then goes still, “you know what my nightmares are?”

Eddie holds himself motionless and looks him in the eye from the side, “what?”

Richie nods over at the lit kitchen door, “Not falling back asleep in time before we start hearing Bev and Bill moaning up a storm out there.”

Richie frowns and darts his eyes over, “they better not...” He rests a hand on Richie’s knee, “that’s so many fucking germs in one place.”

Richie was tutting, “I’m sure even you’d like it if you tried.”

“Tried what?” Eddie was still distracted by the prospect of mono or the clap in Richie’s kitchen.

“Kissing.”

“I wasn’t actually referring to kis...” He trails off, Richie’s was looking at him intently, eyes naked and focused. Like a laser pointer to a cat. He was the laser. He pauses and gulps dryly, “yeah.”

*A human mouth has over 100 to 200 different germs living in it at any given time.*

Richie takes the sides of his face, “Even you.” He smiles teasingly, “after you hate it for a while of course.”

He takes in a sharp breath, he peers up, “I’d probably hate it, period.”

Richie inches toward him like the longest moment of his life, “totally and completely.”

Richie was hovering before him, mouth slightly open, eyelashes reflecting the light and the soft buzz in between the both of them. He approaches like the slowest moving meteor, Eddie waits patiently as the stationary earth before everything builds inside him to a point, he closes the gap.

Eddie closes the gap because why the fuck not, and all his nerves light up, his thoughts turning to white noise and breath catching in his throat. Richie’s mouth is warm and surprisingly soft, like cocoa butter or high-end chap stick. It also tastes like bad chocolate.

The touch sends electric tingles to his toes as his brain tries to process the moment, *kissing stupid Richie Tozier, and all it took was several encounters with clown-shaped death itself.*

Richie is tentative in the way normal Richie is not, his confident limbs sticking out at different abstract angles and his mouth slow, large against his, hesitant. He still has a swarmy look on his face, but it’s broken up by something delicate and digging its nails into Eddie’s arm.

Eddie grabs him and readjusts him on his lap, getting him properly facing him and his arms wrapping around his waist, Eddie pushes up into a harder kiss. Richie makes a soft sound and they meet like they might fall apart the next moment, Richie grabs his neck and pulls him closer.

He's sugary sweet and makes his heart pound in his wrist as the whole dark night felt a little softer.

"Oh," they hear the opening of a door beside him, "okay, wow."

Eddie pulls back right away at the noise and his face heats up by an entire nine yards, Richie pulls away much slower and seems to just sit their plainly in a daze.

"Th-that's not what I e-expected." Bill and Bev were back at the door, they stare back at each other.

Richie got his bearings back gradually and then turns to them first, "what?" He wipes his mouth and makes eye contact with Bill, "Jealous I got some before you did?"

Eddie whacks him on the shoulder, "you didn't get anything."

Bill sniffs, he crosses his arms, "w-we al-already did that."

Richie shakes his head, "Well I just got to fifth base."

"Oh my God," Eddie goes to push him off.

Bev laughs and starts to walk over, "fifth, huh?"

"It's the next dimension, fucking fifth base fifth dimension with turtles or some shit." He leans sideways, "led there by Eddie K's mouth."

He rolls his eyes, "ignore him."

"Ignore me?"

"At least I'm trying to." Eddie responds slowly and looks the other

way, his face still flushed from being walked-in on.

“That’s not what you said when your tongue was in my mouth,” Richie hugs his arms around Eddie’s shoulder, “in fact, you didn’t say anything. Your tongue was in my mouth.” He hums, “those were the days.”

“No tongues were in any mouths.”

“Come on,” He pouted, “we just fucked in the fifth dimension!”

Eddie groans, “and *someone* doesn’t want it happen again!” He threatens.

Richie chuckles and leans down and kisses Eddie’s cheek, “alright, lover.”

There is a slight drop and Eddie is looking at Richie’s eyes, they are both grinning this time, Richie mouths something but it’s almost inaudible. *Cute*

“I’m g-going to have a lot of th-things to forget now.” Bill walked over stiffly to the coffee table and surveys the piles of movies. “A lot.”

Bev clears her throat, she approaches slowly, “how about All Dogs Go to Heaven?” She picks up a random VHS.

“Anything,” Bill almost moans and Bev holds up the VHS cover, Richie waves them by.

“Whatever.” Richie was looking at Eddy still, his hand ghosting over his cheek.

“Yeah.”

Eddie did not want to be the type of couple to gross out people in public space, but he was also a loser- and he assumed they could do what they want now and then. They kiss through the singing dog movie and manage to fall asleep for what felt like the first time that week.

## 2. Put your Shirt Back on

Eddie came out and planted his feet, putting his hands out in presentation, “what do you think?”

Richie looked him and down with raised eyebrows, “could your shorts be any shorter?”

“Ugh,” Eddie moved to go back into the changing stall.

“No, that was a compliment,” Richie waved his hand in the air, “I’m a fan. Plus, it gives the bullies less material to wedgie you with.”

Eddie rolled his eyes, “I’m bringing Stanley next time I do this.”

“What? So you can look like dweebs together?” Richie offered as he leaned on a spare mannequin, “I’m gonna make you *cool* .”

Eddie looks at him flatly, “talk to me when you get a glasses-change.”

Richie adjusts his specs on his face, “next outfit Eds! Maybe not bright turquoise this time?”

Eddie tugs at his new shorts, “bright colors help identify you if you get lost or your body is covered in debris.”

Richie makes a face, “body?” He wrinkled his nose, “jesus, your morbidity is showing lover-boy. I’ll stick to wearing jeans in this life and avoiding being mauled for my tacky color scheme in the next.”

Eddie rolls his eyes, “you’ll regret that when your shirt is the same color as the dirt covering your corpse.”

Richie winked, “they are going to identify my body by dick size alone- scientists are shocked, the general sexy masses mourn for their loss.”

“I’m going to go change now!” Eddie walks back behind the curtains.

Richie makes a scoffing noise, “alright, but maybe don’t take a millennium this time? I seriously almost turned 13 out here.”

Eddie starts unbuttoning his shirt one button at a time, “I have a cast on. This isn’t exactly easy.” He maneuvers his bulky arm plaster through the arm-hole, delicately tugging the button-up shirt over the thick wrapping an inch at a time.

He changes his shorts into a light mauve pair with an elastic white waist-band, he doesn’t particularly care about Richie’s opinion that much. He just invited him for...well, his own reasons.

He stares at the next polo shirt for a long moment, this was the next challenge. He had access to his fingertips, but raising his arm over his head was a process unto itself.

He begins the arduous task of struggling the shirt hole over his head and tugging the fabric over his bent arm.

“Tick-tock Eddie,” he could hear Richie jiggling his leg up and down outside, “I could have built the ark out here and repopulated the earth by now.”

Eddie makes a point of going even slower, “why did you come if you were just going to hurry me the whole time?”

“Ahem,” Richie clears his throat, “I thought this was an unsaid fact.”

Eddie raises both eyebrows, “Oh?”

“Yeah, that of the Loser’s my approval is the most sought after. The magnum-opus of companions.” If Richie’s ego had a face, Eddie would punch it.

“Maggie Stevenson called you a greasy little rat with an ass for a mouth yesterday,” he scoffed, “I don’t think you’re the manga-opis of anything.”

Richie was snickering, “never change Eddie Kaspbrak.”

He shook his head and walked out of the changing room, presenting the light green shirt, “this would go with my loafers.”

Richie heaved a huge sigh, “you had me wait the best years of my life



out here for a pair of pink shorts?" His eyes lingered on the nylon sports wear.

Eddie did a small turn, "they're mauve."

"Of course," Richie flopped down a little harder in his chair, "but are you trying to get beat up this year?"

He made a noise in the back of his throat, "nylon traps the least amount germs in it."

Richie groans heavily, "fine. I'm not saying no to your tiny pink shorts." He sat up brightly, "it goes with the cast."

Eddie sniffs and glances down at his cast, "well the vagina-monster you added isn't helping." He couldn't wait to get this thing off after his friends finally took a crack at it. Richie's contributions were the most notable additions that Eddie had to get creative with to black out. The heart on it was the exception.

Richie stands up slowly and cracks his back, "alright, but let's do this faster than a snail's pace. I'm sure we can get you ten more things that match your third fanny-pack."

Eddie turns back to the curtain, "no more fanny packs. And, I told you, this takes ti- woah." Richie takes a couple steps and pushes him into the changing room.

"I'm here to help."

Eddie scowls, "I swear to god if you try to give me a wedgie-" He begins his threat, Richie just pats his shoulder.

"I'll save it for a later day," Eddie swears he sees him wink, "now, let's get this senior citizen party started!" He reaches for the bottom of his shirt.

"Hey hey hey," he pushes his fingers away, "I'm not that incapacitated." His cheeks were going a little pink, plus, they hadn't even talked about anything yet. *That* was still not talked about.

Richie tries to reach for his short again, “prove it.” He put a finger in the air, “Raise that shirt over your head in under ten seconds.”

“I’m not fucking proving anything to-”

“One.”

“Fuck you.”

“Two.”

Eddie quickly reaches for the bottom of his shirt and struggles to lift it over his head like a normal person, his arm barely reaches his shoulder top and he wobbles back and forth, he groans in the back of his head.

Richie grabs the fabric and helps him get it over his cast, he was smiling like a cheeky bastard when Eddie’s head is free. His face is a little warm and he sticks his tongue out at him.

“You don’t have to make fun of me like this...” He mumbles and looks the other direction.

Richie furrows his brow, “Come on,” he says slowly and tosses the polo shirt aside, “Can’t a guy be helpful? Give me *some* credit.”

Eddy reaches for another shirt, he snorts, “right.” He lifts up his next yellow shirt and Richie helps get it over his arm this time.

“Besides,” he seems to pointedly mess up Eddie’s hair as he yanks it over his head, “this is what I’m supposed to do. Or people like this, for, uh, this kind of thing.” He said it stiltedly, oddly.

Eddie tilts his head, “what kind of thing?” Richie wasn’t meeting his eye, he focused instead steadily on the task of gently guiding his plaster arm through the arm tube. “What kind of thing? Am I supposed to know some sort of Richie-procedure you’re not saying.”

Richie rolls his eyes, “don’t over think it.”

Eddie gets his other arm through the hole, “don’t complicate it.”

Richie gives him a somber look and fixes him with a gaze, “we kissed, right?”

Eddie’s eyes go wide and he chokes on his next breath, they hadn’t really talked about that since the night it happened a week ago. Especially didn’t mention it in a five by five changing room with his chest previously exposed.

He coughs for another moment, Richie pats him on the back, “oh my God.” He clunks him between the shoulder blades, “Don’t die.”

Eddie takes a deep breath and reaches for his inhaler that he wasn’t carrying around any more. He glances back up, “Yeah.” He finally says with his face darkening, “we did that.”

Richie grins, “I’m sure you’re still reeling from it, I understand the shock value of this magic mouth.”

“Ugh,” he rubs his nose, “I’m not reeling from you trying to mess with Bill.” He had a feeling his ears were still bright red anyway. This is why he hadn’t brought it up in a week.

“Excuse me?” Richie frowns slightly.

“Bill.” He articulates, “Messing with him, we kissed, I get it. It wasn’t a big deal...”

Richie’s eyes became saucer’s behind his bottle cap glasses and his mouth falls open slowly, “Um...the fuck?” His face actually fell into a scowl, “what are you talking about?”

Eddie through his hands in the air, “I’m not dumb Richie! I wasn’t going to hold it against you. Trust me, I have other things to hold against you. You were just being Richie. Though maybe next time...” He meets his eyes sadly, he looks back down, “nevermind.”

Richie’s shoulders were hunching over, “Fucking, fuck.” He was glaring, “FUCK.” He jerks his head up, “I went to fifth base with an idiot.”

Eddie flicked him in the ear, "What did I just say? I already told you I got it, I have this whole time."

Richie's eyes go wild, "No you don't!" He looked in both directions, first down, and then to the right, and then up back at Eddie. He strikes out his hand and grabs Richie's free hand quickly, his mouth was a squiggle on his pale face and he looked visibly worried.

Eddie stands perfectly still, he feels Richie squeeze his hand. Things short-circuit in his thoughts for a short moment.

"See?" Richie was looking all around now, "Bill's not even here."

He looks at him blankly, his eyes are wide, "you've been making fun of me since the moment we met."

Richie gives a half-smile, "I was hoping you were smarter than this. How many diseases can you name again?"

Eddie looks down at his shoes, some hope he couldn't name was rising again in his chest. It wasn't real, he had told himself that the second he even glanced at a boy. Yet here he was.

He finally peeks up, "I can name one. His name is Richie," he says flatly, "and he, uh," he trails off, "he's holding my hand?"

Richie shrugs, "I like you dipshit." He says clearly and fully, "you're the one I was gonna get eaten by that shitty clown for."

Eddie's mouth was completely open, "so, by people like this, you meant...?"

"Well," Richie was looking abnormally twitchy, "we could make it up as we go. I was thinking you could call me 'taken but still hot as hell' or 'that dude who gives it to me good.'"

"No."

"Optimus in my Pants Prime."

"No."

“The alternative to my mom.”

“Fuck no.”

“I’m running out of phrases here Eds.” He scratched his nose, “and I’m pretty sure we don’t work at a law firm together, sooo.”

Eddie blinked a couple times, “I feel like you asked me out without actually saying it out loud.”

Richie opened his mouth and then closed it, “Well, I mean. I thought, I mean, it happened.”

Eddie was forming a small smile, “call me anything you want.” He squeezed, “do you want to go out?” Richie’s mouth still gaped open and closed like a fish. Eddie raises both eyebrows, “break it to me easy.”

“Yes!” Richie finally says, forcefully, he looks away, “You make everything hard.”

“I’m glad that’s settled.” He lets his hand go, “let’s never tell my mom and buy some shirts.” He reaches for his next outfit, he had one or two left. He pauses when he feels Richie stiff beside him, “what?” He ventures.

Richie examines him for a long moment, “should we tell the kids at school?”

Eddie lifts an eyebrow, “unless you want to be beat up twice as hard.”

Richie sticks his bottom lip out, “what if that Kelly girl tries to ask you out? Or fucking Greg Sawyer. I know where he’s looking.”

Eddie sprouts a large smile, “then I’ll say no.” Richie says simply and leans over, “duh.” He pecks him on the cheek and feels Richie jolt completely upright.

He glows and face melts a little, “oh.” He glances at him, “nice.”

Eddie shoos him, “now get out. I can do the pants part myself.”

Richie gives a half-smile, “but for how long will you be saying that?”

“I don’t think so,” he nudges him out of the changing room, “nope.” He closes the curtains and feels his heart give a couple extra-forceful thumps. He had just done that. This somehow felt braver than stabbing a demonic force of clown.

Richie gave him two thumbs up and an ovation for the next outfit. They discuss going to the movies and whatever the hell this was called.

It turns out, they find out a couple years later, it was just ‘my boyfriend.’

### 3. No Rule Book

“I’m gonna punch him.”

“Don’t punch him,” Eddie wished he didn’t have to be the reasonable one, he wiped his palms on his slacks.

“I’m gonna fucking deck him.”

Eddie rolled his eyes, “Why don’t you say something snarky in his general direction like usual and we’ll be done with it?”

Richie was looking straight ahead with his eyes screwed up, “I thought we literally killed the lead bully at this school, and now we have to fucking kill all of them? Fucking woof, we only have so many wells in this city.”

Eddie grabbed onto his collar and dragged him back from the lockers, “He’s going to stuff your glasses down your throat and then I’d be watching you drink soup out of a straw for five months.”

Richie taps his chin as if he was considering it. “I accept that,” He put a finger in the air, “but you’re going to need a better funeral speech than that for Victor Criss, something along the lines of ‘his mouth looked like a smug cat’s asshole after it was kissed with dysentery-”

Eddie made a deep groan, “this is why we were both in detention today.”

“No,” Richie’s eyes became slits, “You were there because Vic tried to spit in your mouth during lunch.” He was almost shaking.

Eddie wrinkled his nose, “Tried.” He held up his hand with blood under his fingernails, “And Mr. Finkley stepped in.”

Richie was still grumbling to himself, “We literally live with the most trash adults in the world. I would expel him! With a tractor covered in chlamydia.”

Eddie snorts, “Let’s just walk home and forget Victor Criss tried to

give me his damn mono.”

Richie balled up his fists, “*I’m* supposed to give you mono!”

Eddie kicks his ankle and pushes him out the door, “you wish.” He sniffs, “every single one of the losers club can get fucked when flu season comes around. My mom is still already talking about putting me in a bubble.”

Richie strolled next to him and Eddie was relieved to see him cooling off as they made it outside, “You’re saying that now,” he blew a kiss, “but that’s before my magic mouth. I’ve been practicing.”

Eddie jumps down the next two steps, “with your sister?”

Richie flipped him off with one hand, “Never mind.” He says flatly, “I’m helping Victor Criss next time.”

Eddie shook his head, “no you’re not.”

Richie sighs and puts a hand on his shoulder, “You’re lucky you’re cute.” He leaned on his shoulder, “And for the record, I was going to say the ‘with your mom’ part next.”

“I know Richie,” he raises his eyebrows, “I know.”

They start down the sidewalk past the school and back toward their houses, “So, we were doing homework in the library?” Eddie says slowly, which was close to true after sitting in the teacher's office for two hours for fighting and whatever Richie did.

“We were fucking in a hillbillies truck,” Richie offers listlessly.

“Yeah,” he kicks a rock ahead of them, “that’ll go over really well. I can’t wait for the next string of AIDs talks with my mom and her praying over her sons soon to be dead body.”

Richie rolled his eyes, “We wore a condom.”

Eddie snickers slightly, “Shut up.” It was kind of nice to be alone with Richie without everyone else- they had been dancing around



each other the last few months. With some kissing. And a lot of back and forth.

It's not like they knew what they were doing, there wasn't a guidebook for dating your annoying friend.

Eddie is about to tell him to shut up again when they hear a hoot from the other side of the parking lot.

His eyes go wide, "Shit."

"Hey, sanitizer princess," Victor Criss bore his teeth, "we can finish where we left off."

"I'm gonna murder him!" Richie turns in the general direction of the bullies, he blinks, "Also, nice job babe."

Eddie looks over his shoulder at his work on Victor's face, three long red streaks across his right cheek, Eddie gulps and tries to back up.

"Let's go," he grabs his wrist, "Like, really fast. There's a convenience store close by-"

"HEY," Richie squirmed out of his grip and cupped his mouth, he began to yell, Eddie had a bad feeling about this, "YOU, mom's least favorite failed abortion," He had Vics attention, "you look like some ball sweat that seeped out of my pants and formed the biggest puddle of douche in the world. I'd tell you to go fuck yourself, but I'm sure your cousin is already doing that for you."

Vic's face goes absolutely slack, Richie finishes by making a rude gesture at him.

"I hate you," Eddie says under his breath as he watches the bullies eyes go from intent to mad bull during a fire alarm.

"What." Victor and Belch took a step forward, "the fuck," he reached in his back pocket, "did you just say to me?"

He took out what looked like a piece of jagged metal in one hand and a pair of brass knuckles he was keeping in his back pocket.

Richie blinks a couple times, “Oh.” He says under his breath.

“This is why I hate you.” Eddie takes his arm and pushes him to start running, “he has fucking brass knuckles.”

“I’M GOING SKEWER YOU TINY-” He’s cut off by Eddie tossing a trashcan over behind them to impede their path.

The older boys were in pursuit, another boy who had joined their ranks and was flanking their side.

Richie’s eyes dart around and then he turns, “Run. Right, fair point.”

“Oh my God.”

They begin to take off and Eddie wishes he had his inhaler at that moment, however his gym teacher would be surprised about how fast he could go when pursued by people holding a rusty pipe.

“I wanna fight the clown again, I wanna fight the clown again,” Eddie was imagining his worst fear might be revised to ‘skewered by bully.’

“This way,” Richie steers them toward the nearby bridge and some of the country homes.

“Into the middle of the woods?” Eddie was freaking out a little bit, “I WANT A REFUND ON OUR ASSOCIATION.”

Richie grabs his hand leads them toward the narrow bridge, “shut up and run.”

Eddie follows him with his legs pumping and heart in his throat, going over a slide show of his own death and Richie’s panicked eyes. He hopes Richie at least gets away, he’d rip off more of the skin to make sure of that.

Richie drags them around the corner and then toward a tucked away peeling shack up against the tunnel wall. Eddie jumps back from the dilapidated doorway, but Richie shoves him all the way inside.

“This looks like where people die.” He pants, “I think-”

Richie puts a hand over his mouth and roughly pushed him up against the nearby wall with a wild look in his eyes. Richie for once was the one making him be quiet.

“The little fucks went this way.” He hears the pounding of feet and a steady stream of three boys passing through the bridge. Richie’s pulse throbbed through his throat and he waits furiously for their footsteps to fade.

He kept his eyes locked with Richie and it reminded him that time he broke his arm and was about to get eaten, he was looking into his face right then too.

They stand there, pressed against the wall for a solid five minutes, waiting the extra minutes just to make sure. After a long tense period they eventually part and start to wheeze, collapsing onto the wooden floor to catch their breath.

Eddie puts a hand on his forehead, “Fuck.” He leans back, cross-legged on the floor and throwing his head back to the ceiling, “Never,” he gasps, “again.”

Richie sits next to him and puts a hand on his chest, “I’m sure we can hide from them...for the rest of our lives, right?”

Eddie scowls at him, “Why’d you have to do your thing? We could have lived perfectly well not calling gangs of psychopaths failed abortions or whatever.”

Richie frowns and looks down at his hands, he picks at his nail. “I’m still pissed.” He says simply, it hit Eddie a strangely open look, he glances at him. “Sorry I didn’t, you know. Stop it before.”

Eddie sighs and saddles up next to him, “I’d punch him for you too if I could get away with it.”

Richie raked a hand through his sweaty hair, “We killed a demonic force of child-eating evil...” He pursed his lips, “we should have at least three babes and a new Nintendo.”

“Three babes?” Richie raised his eyebrows.

Richie gave a sly smile, “I mean I got half of that. But my sister still broke my last Nintendo.” Eddie frowned at him, Richie grabbed his cheek, “Half, see what I did there? You count as like four babes.”

Eddie exhales slowly and leaned forward, “I literally am still so mad at you.” He crossed his arms, “more so then the time you actually got my mom to kiss you on the cheek.”

Richie snickered, “I’m a simple boy.”

Eddie flicks him, “you got that right.” He reaches his hand out, and then slowly takes it back.

Richie leans on him, “Since I may get one good punch in and then have them throw me under their truck they were conceived in by their brother-sister parents, I,” he gaped a little bit, “my bad.”

Eddie lets out a long breath of air, “At least you called him a douche,” he says listlessly, “he made a pretty good face after that.”

Richie smiles, “A pretty damn good face, like I’d pay for that all over again.”

Eddie shrugs and lets out a little laugh, “I’m not gonna say ‘worth it’ but... He was probably gonna pummel me anyway after I scratched his face up.”

Richie grins back at him, “are you forgiving me?”

Eddie kisses him on the cheek and leans back, “never.”

Richie takes Eddie’s face in between his hands and looks him in the eye, Eddie smiles slowly, “so you could have done worse.”

He shrugs, “You can work on paying me back.”

He presses forward and kisses him in the dark of the dilapidated shack on the side of the road, hiding from bullies that would hopefully never come.

Richie kisses him slowly, tasting the heat and panic from the last thirty minutes.

They get a little closer than they have before, crossing one of those lines they had been flitting around for months now. They'd be heading to high school soon.

He ends up climbing in his lap and kissing as the birds chirp in the distance and the sun starts to slink down the side of the building.

Eddie feels something tight in his chest and opens his eyes as he pulls back, "what are we doing?" He says it a little miserably.

Richie blinks a couple times like he was coming out of a dream, he tilts his head to the side, "Is that a trick question?"

Eddie thunks his head back on the wood behind him, "are there rules? I can't ask you to homecoming exactly."

Richie slips in next to him, "Don't think about too much." It was a very Richie thing to say.

"I don't know what we're doing," he declares and frowns up at the cracks in the ceiling, "I mean, they don't just write up about how we're supposed to do this. Is this dating?"

Richie takes his hand and makes a face, "are we talking about us? Is that what we're doing? Cause that fucking sucks."

Eddie flips him off, "I like you too much. Happy? We're talking about us."

Richie's face flushed a distinct shade of red and that almost made this whole ordeal worth it. Richie shuffles back and forth, "K."

Eddie smiles and knocks their heads together, "I should say that more often apparently."

Richie shakes his head, "fuck you." He puts his head on his shoulder and doesn't look at him, "I like you too." He peeks up, "I think we established this?"

"Fine," he kisses his hand, it was getting bigger than his in the last couple months to his chagrin, "The rest doesn't matter. I like you."

Richie's face goes red again, "I, yeah."

Eddie laughs, "a lot more often!"

"Whatever." Richie wasn't looking at him and it made Eddie's chest swell, it wasn't a bad thing. "As much as you want."

"I, yeah." Eddie repeats the words fondly.

"Asshole," he pushes him and Eddie rolls out of his lap slowly, "wait, I didn't say leave-" Eddie just shakes his head.

"We should get back before my mom calls your mom and it becomes a whole thing."

Richie sighs, "I'm an orphan, remember?" He says sarcastically, "It won't be a thing."

Eddie squeezes his shoulder, "it's already a thing. We're having a heart to heart in an abandoned creepy shack."

"We've had weirder," he stands up, "if only it had a well. I'd invite Vic here."

Eddie rolls his eyes, "jail, jail, jail." He sings, "and then more jail."

Richie takes his hand as Eddie gets up, he looks him in the eye hesitantly, opening and closing his mouth like a strange fish, "We're... *a thing*, right?"

Eddie raises both eyebrows, "If you weren't a wall of bravado that I had crush on I'd think Richie Tozier can get insecure."

Richie whacked him, "shut up."

Eddie kisses his shoulder, "We're a thing. Or else I wouldn't let you lock me in weird places and make out."

“Damn, first make out, give me a high five.”

Eddie furrows his brow, “no.”

They slowly begin to walk home with the sun at their back.